

Inside The Bible House



NEW YORK
AMERICAN BIBLE SOCIETY
1907



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Inside · The · Bible · House

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The Contrast Between Outside and Inside

THE Bible House in New York is a solid brick building outwardly suggestive of age and of quiet, easy unconcern toward the busy life of the streets. Few contributors to the work of the American Bible Society have very clear ideas about what goes on inside of those walls. The very word "work" so often used in reports and letters from the field, is a good deal like the cloth of a favorite old coat—worn smooth and glistening with use until none of its former characteristics remain to inform the eye. Doubtless many, especially those living at a distance, are curious to know just what makes up the daily occupation of Bible Society workers in that quaint old building. We invite all such to enter to-day with us and look about for themselves.

Once inside the building one will find any idea of easy-going, unconcerned quiet quickly driven away. The workers have the constrained look of pressing activities. The workshops thrill with the quick throb of machinery, and with the fine eagerness of trained laborers. Perhaps the contrast between outside calm and inside action may remind one of a like contrast found in some great river, ages old between its banks, unostentatious, and apparently subdued and quiet, and yet holding in its depths strong motion; power to move many mills, to bear much tonnage of shipping, and to render noble service to many people. You feel that the Bible House is a place of power.

Preparing Work for the Society

Take the elevator at the Ninth Street entrance and fly up to the fifth floor. Turn to the right and you enter a great room sixty feet long and thirty feet wide, filled, except for narrow alleyways, with paper in large square piles. Each great sheet of paper bears printed upon it many pages from the Bible. On some piles the pages are few and large, with large type; on some the pages are many and small, with small type; and on some the words are in strange languages. Women, sometimes singing as they work, are endlessly counting and arranging these printed sheets, and two or three men are perpetually wheeling them away on trucks. It seems a work that may easily weary one by its drudgery, but so is every part of the process by which sheets of white paper are taken into one door of the Bible House and transformed into finished volumes of Scripture which go

forth into the world from another door at the rate of 300 volumes for every working hour, day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year.

A like wearisome drudgery appears in the next great room, where the compositors' wooden cases occupy the space, and men are picking up one type at a time and setting it in its place in the composing stick, and so building up from the little bits of metal, words, and sentences, and pages. The same sort of patient drudgery appears at the proofreaders' desks, where the whole force of the men goes into detection of errors; and on the next floor below, where men pile the sheets to be pressed flat and smooth; where others feed the sheets into jaws that bite them in two, a hundred at a time, and where the half



sheets are handed to wise machines that take them with a knowing twist and almost instantly hand them out into the trough below, folded, with each page facing its fellow, ready for the girls who patiently gather all the sheets needed to make up a volume and pass them on to other girls who deftly sew them together. You see the same small drudgery on the third floor, where the space is occupied by many curious machines and work-benches, and where men cut the pasteboard, or the cloth, or the leather for the covers. Some paste the covers, some emboss them

and letter them; some trim the leaves of the volumes, some round the backs; and so on through the long, delicate process, until the parts of the book are brought into place and the finished volume lies before you neat, clearly printed, and attractive, as the Book of God should be. Pass on down to the pressroom on the second floor, with its great, clattering, rumbling printing machines. There, too, men are doing the merest drudgery—handing the large white sheets to the mouth of the machine, in order that it may take hold of the paper with its teeth, draw it in out of sight, and quickly send it forth below, sharply, beautifully printed in pages with the words that are for the healing of the nations.

The Invisible Part of the Story

The visible part of the story of making these books is the taking of infinite pains in trifling and tiresome acts of drudgery. This is typical of all work done in the Bible House. Yet to workers who are Christians there is an invisible part to the story. A good old minister once comforted a discouraged saint by saying, "Even the disciples at Bethphage who went to get that donkey were doing work for Jesus

Christ." To those who love Jesus Christ, during this slow drudgery of making the Book vision comes of what the Book will do for the world. That beautiful reference Bible in flexible morocco covers will be the life companion of some faithful pastor of the flock. That large Pulpit Bible, when it has gone to its church, year after year will guide the thoughts of a worshiping congregation to life in Christ. Those little Bibles, just being inspected before they are wrapped for shipment, will permanently shape the lives of Sunday-school children because given them in their impressible years. That little Gospel which can go into a vest pocket will be taken home by a rough man from a revival meeting, the instrument in God's hands of saving a life from corruption that had already set in. Vision of results glorifies the drudgery of labor in all departments of the work of the Bible Society because all deal with the book which has a mission appointed by God himself. By making Bibles at the lowest possible cost consistent with good workmanship, the Bible Society fosters a great work of Bible distribution at home and abroad, through its own Agents, and through missionary or other societies supplied with Scriptures at the actual cost of production. The greatness of this boon to missions is little understood. Yet it stamps the work of the Bible Society through this manufacturing department with a characteristic named by Jesus Christ as marking his own work. Through this busy group of workshops, "to the poor the Gospel is preached."

The Executive Department

Every separate shop in the Manufacturing Department of the Bible House has at its head a skilled master in its special branch of the work; a Superintendent sees that the shops work accurately, harmoniously, and uninterruptedly together; and finally, the Treasurer of the Bible Society is General Manager, controlling the work, paying the bills, and taking over the product as an executive officer of the Board of Managers of the Bible Society. Thought and skill direct the whole process of making books. Keen desire, not to compete with others, but to secure the best results at the lowest cost and greatest profit to all men, possesses all concerned. Questions of popular demand, of taste, of proportion of the page, of type, paper, and binding are continually brought to the Secretaries, who are commonly supposed to be strictly executive and administrative officers, absorbing a notable amount of their time in this preliminary work. For the making of books, notwithstanding the important place which it holds in the activities of the Bible House, is but preparation for the real work of the Bible Society. This will be seen if you come into the Bible House by the main entrance on Fourth Avenue. Here you are in the midst of the Executive Department.

Beyond the glass doors which face the entrance is the Committee room. At the long table in this room the standing committees of the

Board of Managers—on Finance, on Agencies, on Versions, on Auxiliaries, on Distribution, etc.—wrestle with the great problems of Bible translation, manufacture, and circulation, hearing continually the cry for more books that comes literally from the four quarters of the globe, and doing what can be done with means always too meager. After discussion in committee these problems are acted upon by the Board, which meets the first Thursday of every month in the Managers' room, a beautiful assembly hall on the second floor, opposite the head of the main staircase. The decisions of the Board are then left to the executive officers, who are two Corresponding Secretaries, a Treasurer, and a Recording Secretary, to be put into execution in the whole world-wide field of the Society. Their preparation for this work is love of it and special knowledge of all its parts.

The Treasurer

The door on the left as you go into the main entrance hall of the Bible House, gives access to the mail-order room, the salesroom, the packing room, and shipping office. These all are sections of the Depository, with its stock of Scriptures in many languages, and in the curious raised letters for the blind. All of them are under the immediate supervision of the Treasurer, and in all of them busy clerks are perpetually writing the invoices, and the records, and the accounts that have to be kept in order to show what becomes of every book added to the stock or taken from it.

The door on the right of the entrance hall leads to the Treasurer's private office and the counting room. These offices are as quiet as a bank. Their fittings and equipment, and paraphernalia of records, and ledger accounts, and vouchers, and bills, are like those of any business house, for the processes by which money is accounted for

are generally much the same the world over. But here these processes are not quite colorless. This office has financial relations with every state in the Union. On its books are entered the doings of those long-robed printers in Constantinople, Beirut, Bangkok, Shanghai, and Yokohama, who are printing more than a million volumes a year of Scriptures for the Society; drafts drawn here are cashed in Cuba, in South America, in Japan, or in



South Africa; and the account of moneys paid includes details of the work of eleven foreign agencies, besides those in the United States, as well as picturesque bills of materials for book manufacture; from

tools, machinery, and paper by the ton, to glue, and needles, and thread. In this department, too, are kept the accounts of the Bible House itself, for the Bible Society occupies only about half of the building, and the rent of rooms occupied by business firms it carefully husbanded, so that they shall cover the expenses of the building and, furthermore, yield a surplus to pay the salaries of the executive officers. No contributions for the general work of the Society are used for repairs of the building, taxes, insurance, or for salaries of the executive officers; nor do any of these expenses serve to increase the cost of the Scriptures here manufactured. The variety of these transactions suggests the qualities demanded in the Treasurer.



Stringent rules govern the Treasurer's office. A warrant from the Finance Committee is drawn for every payment, and every check signed by the Treasurer is countersigned by a Secretary who has examined the warrant. Every cent that passes through the office leaves its mark, so that all transactions can be traced. Thus the financial situation of the Society can be seen at any time, although this requires more experience than is acquired in a village store; for these complicated accounts cover Bible translation, manufacture, and distribution by sale or gift in two hemispheres. The Treasurer's daily duty is to hold all branches of the finances of the Bible Society in the masterful grasp of his mind. For this reason, he can act toward the Society somewhat as the governor does to a steam engine; if the rate of progress is too rapid, so that the appropriations tend to exceed the receipts, it is his duty to give warning, so that the speed may be reduced. Contributions from churches, Sunday schools, and individuals fix the pace at which Bible work advances. They are given for increasing the circulation of the Bible, and they are sacredly and immediately applied to that one purpose.

The Secretaries

The great problem ever confronting the Society is the problem of using all opportunities for taking the Scriptures to those who need them, at home and abroad. So great is this problem that when any society or any individual takes up Bible distribution, with or without the co-operation of the American Bible Society, its advent into this vast field is hailed with delight. To promote this one work the Society exists, and all connected with it. The Society is in some degree responsible, in each of its widely differing fields, for providing

millions of people with the Scriptures, notwithstanding obstacles special to each. In the Secretaries' rooms on the second floor of the Bible House are the letters, documents, and other sources of information about Bible circulation in the whole field of the Society.

To plan for the supply of destitute villages in the United States or destitute empires in Asia; to know in detail the elements of the whole problem, to place them lucidly and accurately before the members of the Board of Managers, and then to give effect to their decision, is the duty of the Secretaries of the Bible Society.

Commonly, details of the work are divided between the two Corresponding Secretaries; one becoming by long, careful study, a specialist in matters relating to China, and the other, on the situation in the Levant, etc., etc.; one on the Southern States, and the other, on the Northern; and so on. This expert knowledge of fields and their needs, makes the Secretaries' rooms the scene of frequent and important conferences with missionaries; with masters of language who co-operate with the Society in Bible translation; with pastors and leaders of thought; with agents of the Society; and with visitors who come to express kindly sympathy, to learn what is being done, or simply to see something of the process of printing Bibles. This part of the duty of the office absorbs time, but is of great importance. A similarly important, and little known, duty of the Secretaries, is that of reporting progress and needs at the great meetings of the denominational Assemblies, Conferences, or Associations, or of the Auxiliary Societies; or even of single churches, which beg for a speaker to come and talk about Bible work. These calls to go out of the city, and perhaps half way across the continent, have to be met. But the fulfillment of this duty in such a way as to bring no harm to other equally pressing duties of the office is often perplexing, to say the least. Moreover, no one can have an intelligent interest in the work of the Bible Society who is without information about its details. The writing out of this information is another of the duties of the Secretaries. They gather the material, plan and edit the *Bible Society Record*, the ponderous Annual Report, and the leaflets or booklets that tell in briefer form the story of the Society's work from month to month and year to year.

The lighter correspondence of the Secretaries is of great volume. Every year the ministers of a score of denominations have to be informed by letter about the work and needs of the Society; some thirty thousand life members must be told by letter the things that especially interest



them in the experiences of the Society to which they belong. The mails bring letters from all points of the compass which touch the springs of many and various emotions, presenting needs, hopes, petitions for Bibles, requests for information upon specific points; individual difficulties presented to a Bible Society Secretary as to a pastor, and many other matters not dreamed of by those who gaze at the Bible House from the outside. All such letters are to be answered kindly, helpfully, and as promptly as the process of intelligently reading the mass will allow. But aside from this the mail-carrier at any moment may lightly toss upon each Secretary's desk a letter which in ten lines raises questions that require days of labor for mastery of their elements, or that demand clear interpretation of vague and confused details before the Board, and even before the churches, on whose contributions the work of the Society depends.

The Call of Our Own Land

The hope of reaching a point where all the destitute in the United States will at last be supplied with Bibles can never come true until children cease to reach the Bible-reading age each year, and immigrants who never saw a Bible cease to land on our shores each week. Ignorance of the first principles of right and duty is a flood that always threatens the land. The barriers against it raised by general instruction in the Bible, can never be finished. Like Holland's dykes against the North Sea, these barriers must be added to, and strengthened, and extended every year, or catastrophe is certain. In our cities, as well as in the farming regions; in the remote mountain districts; in the mining regions; in the forests of the lumbermen; on the river steamers; along the canals and the coasts of the ocean; even in the Sunday schools of our own neighborhood, are numbers who do not have and do not read the Bible. Probably over fifteen millions of people in these United States are living without the Bible, shaping their lives by "unwritten law," which makes for anarchy and ruin. The duty of finding means of impressing this inert mass of people ever weighs upon the minds of the Secretaries of the Society.

Lack of Money for the Work

A thorny element of the problem before the Bible Society is the question of money to do work which ought to be done. The duty of discrimination between degrees of need hampers every proposal for supply of Bibles or of extension. A natural impulse is to grant every request for books. But if this were done indiscriminately many Bibles would be tossed aside with other acquisitions that cost nothing, many would be sold for the price of a drink, and nearer districts would be certain to get a larger proportion of Bibles, while those more distant, however needy, would be left in disappointment, like the cripple of Bethesda who always found someone else stepping down into the pool before him at the moment of blessing. A perpet-

ual free distribution is impossible, and, if possible, might be foolish waste. The rule followed by the Society is to fix prices at cost, so that no one shall pay more than the cost of the books, to require payment of cost where this is possible, to grant books at less than cost where there is ability to pay something, and to give without cost where one who really wants a Bible cannot raise the few cents needed to pay for it. The lack of money may never prevent a Bible lover from possessing a Bible.

Auxiliary Societies that Die

Auxiliary and other local Bible societies are doing a great work in canvassing their own fields, to learn and supply needs. Any societies or individuals who order books to sell again, receive the help of ten per cent discount from catalogue prices. Where it is necessary, their work is further aided by the National Society. These facts open another line of duties laid upon the Secretaries. Applications for Scriptures from the field of one of the Auxiliary Societies are referred to that society. But sometimes an applicant who is so referred replies in an aggrieved tone; he feels that his need was mocked; he cannot find the local auxiliary. It then comes to light that local Bible societies sometimes lose vitality with age and die. For such cases, the National Society has decided that where any auxiliary fails during three successive years to report active operations, it must be warned that without activity it cannot retain the name of a fellow-laborer. It is the delicate duty of the Secretaries to convey this warning in such a way as to quench no smoking flax, and at the same time to end a situation which, if hopeless, is unendurable. After a reasonable delay, if there is still no response, the Secretaries report the fact to the Managers, and the name of the dead society is erased from the list of auxiliaries.

The Burdens of the Foreign Field

The question of Bible circulation is more complicated abroad, if possible, than at home. Numbers are enormous, distance is greater, opportunities are insistent, and the language difficulty, with its steady call for new translations, is only one of many discouraging hindrances. The danger is always present of waste of means by spending money where it is not really needed; that is to say, in a field where another Bible Society works well. A man comes full of enthusiasm with a new version of the Bible which he has made, himself, in a language of Africa, and he almost demands that the American Bible Society shall publish his translation at once. The Secretaries' knowledge shows that the Scriptures have been translated already into that same language, and have been published by another Bible Society. Or another good man comes to the Bible House with a request for a thousand Bibles, which he wishes to circulate in a missionary campaign abroad. The Secretaries' grasp on the whole situation, at home

and abroad, shows that the place to which he wishes to carry the Bibles is already efficiently canvassed by agents of the British Bible Society. Economy, as well as common Christian courtesy, must lead the American Society to refuse both of these requests, referring the men interested in them to the sister society. Only thus can the Secretaries fulfill the trust committed to their charge, for endless waste and confusion would result if Bible societies should disregard each other. If the reader can bring the implications of such incidents of daily experience within the field of his imagination, he can see that a Secretary's daily mail is not to be disposed of at a sitting, and his day's work is not compassed by the four walls of his office, nor limited by the click of his stenographer's untiring writing machine; it deals with a throng of the greatest interests of mankind in four continents.

Every day councils of the Secretaries and the Treasurer are made necessary by some pleasing or distressing occurrence reported from near or from far. Often a new phase of Bible circulation forces its irrepressible demands or its difficulties upon the attention. These the Secretaries carry in their minds wherever they go until new plans are invented, ruminated in night-watches, prayed over in the closet, meditated in railroad trains and at the office desk; beaten into shape in conversation; discussed, analyzed, searched for flaws, and given form in Committee and Board room; cautiously tested in the field, with misgivings and with close watch for weak spots that practical use alone can reveal. These crucial times of advance and of new adaptation are the times that whiten a man's hair. For such momentous decisions shape a world-wide campaign whose results constantly effect the extension of the Kingdom of Christ and have issue beyond this life in eternity.

The Spiritual Influence of the Work

Nothing visibly distinguishes the commonplace drudgeries of the manufacturing department, or of the Treasurer's duties from those of a business whose object is to increase profits and dividends. So, too, little may visibly separate the daily work of the Secretaries in the Bible House from the work of experts placed in charge of any great enterprise. But the work done in the Bible House has special and notable characteristics, some of which have been already suggested. Its aim is to benefit mankind in a way that God has chosen. Its support comes from the people at large who believe in this aim, and whose throbbing hearts, full of love for the Bible and desire for the Divine blessing on all engaged in circulating it, make themselves felt through letters that daily flutter in upon the Bible House desks. The money contributed to the work of the Society is the fruit of self-denial, and is dedicated in prayer by thousands of Christians from Maine to Alaska, from Dakota to Texas, from Turkey, China,

Japan, Mexico, South America, and many other lands. The expectation of the donors is that their dollars and dimes will have direct result in advancing the Kingdom of Christ. Every cent received by the Treasurer is a sacred trust, of which account has to be rendered to God, as well as to the auditors who monthly examine expenditures. The peculiarity of this feature of the work is, that these gifts, sent in with touching words of consecration, stir spiritual life and devotion in all connected with it; for all are fellow-workers with an uncounted host of godly people, whose aim is to forward the execution of God's merciful purpose toward men.

Give Ye Them to Eat

The ever-pressing task before the Society then, is the same task that worried the disciples as they looked at the hungry crowd on the hills beyond Lake Tiberias. The Master's word of instruction, "Give ye them to eat," always stands as the command to his followers, but the Master's intervention too is always sure to be repeated when courage and resource seem about to fail. The empty treasury, with which each year begins, always somehow furnishes provision, and those who see this wonderful result of Divine interposition are made strong in their faith with thanksgiving. The Christian's single token of success is some such positive crown of blessing bestowed upon the work of his hands and his faith. And this task of the American Bible Society is divinely appointed, divinely assisted, and daily divinely crowned.

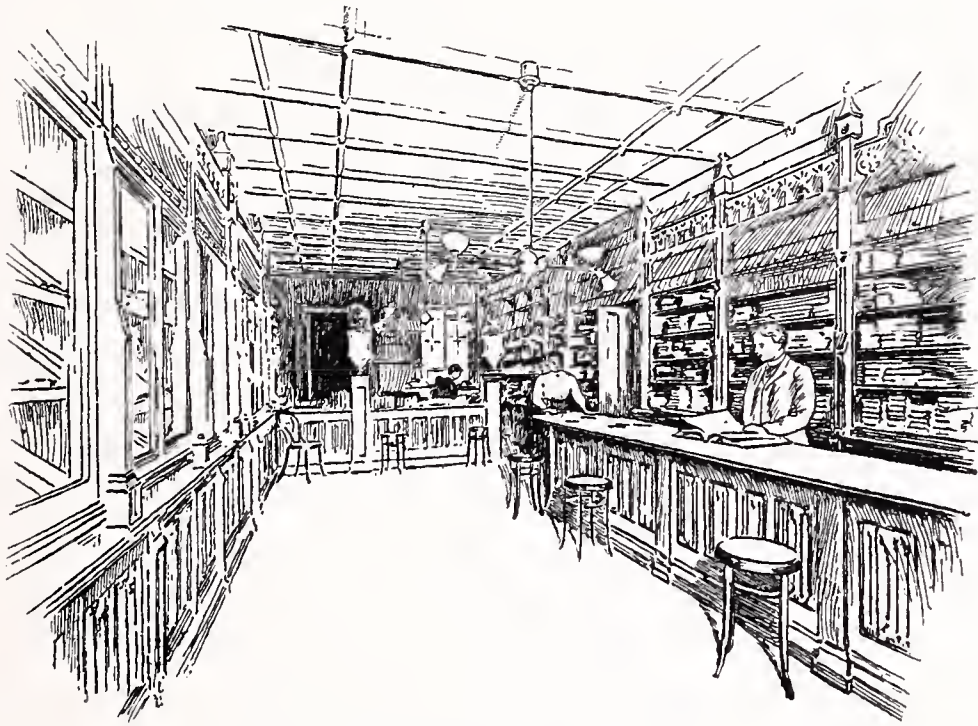
The Door of a Million Bibles

Thus we come back to the power that goes out of the old building, of which we have been trying to explain the place in the work of Bible circulation. The door of the shipping office at the Bible House, by the side of the workmen's entrance, performs a service which makes it worthy of the attention of angels. It has all the familiar marks of doors of shipping offices anywhere—battered side-posts, polished iron shute, boxes on the sidewalk, marked with names that seem taken haphazard from a gazetteer; rough-looking truckmen going in and out, and clerks checking off lists. But every book that goes out of that door is the fruit of faith and prayer. The prayerful support of hundreds and thousands of Christians has made the work possible, and the prayers of the Society, the officers and other work-



ers; prayers of consecration, prayers of entreaty for wisdom, and prayers of humble acknowledgment, mark every stage of the work which places Bibles among men whose path will thenceforth be lighted.

This circumstance makes this humble door of the shipping office a point of immeasurable importance, although no inscription calls attention to the mighty influences which it sends forth. From that door go out every year about a million volumes of Scriptures—Bibles, Testaments, and portions. Each volume, because it contains the gospel of a new life, carries with it the blessing and the promise of the Most High, "My word shall not return unto me void, but shall prosper in that whereto I have sent it." For this reason that narrow doorway is a point of profound significance to the growth and well-being of the United States and of many other lands. It were well if all who pass by might know it as it is—the Door of a Million Bibles.



THE SALESROOM

